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"THE BLACK HEBREWS"

An English Summary of the
Special Committee
Report

The problem of the "Black Hebrews," strictly speaking, concerns illegal aliens and, as such, is a domestic issue for the Israeli authorities. That it has gone unresolved for over twelve years reflects the bewildering dimensions of the dilemma as well as Israel's sensitivity to its implications abroad.

Recently, the Minister of Interior received a full and comprehensive report with concrete recommendations from a special committee appointed to investigate the matter thoroughly. This committee was headed by David Glass, Chairman of the Committee on Law and the Constitution.

The full Hebrew text of the report, over 100 pages long, is now a matter of record. However, as a contribution to the better understanding of the issues involved by interested parties abroad and our English-speaking friends in this country, the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress have cooperated in producing this English summary of the *Glass Report*.

This summary was carefully prepared and we believe it is faithful to the tone and substance of the original document. Its preparation was motivated by our common human rights objectives and commitment to inform.

We hope that this service will lead to a wider appreciation of the problem itself and of the recommendations for its resolution.

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THE COMMITTEE FOR THE EXAMINATION OF THE
PROBLEM OF THE "BLACK HEBREWS" CULT

Jerusalem, 29 Sivan, 5740

June 13, 1980

Dr. Joseph Burg
Minister of the Interior
Jerusalem

Sir,

On 1. Av, 5738 (August 4, 1978), on the recommendation of the Interior and Environment Committee of the Knesset, you appointed the undersigned to serve as a committee to examine the problem of the "Black Hebrews" cult.

We respectfully submit to you herewith the committee's unanimous report and recommendations.

We regret the delay in the submission of the report for reasons outlined therein.

We wish to thank the Ministry of the Interior for the assistance given to the committee in its Work and express particular thanks to Mrs. Hannah Rotstein, who served as its secretary.

Respectfully yours,

David Glass, Chairman

Aryeh Meir

Zvi Tsilker

Ze'ev Katzenellenbogen

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I PREFACE

In pursuance of a recommendation from the Interior and Environment Committee of the Knesset, the Minister of Interior, Dr. Joseph Burg, on 1 Av, 5738 (August 4, 1978), appointed a committee consisting of Mr. David Glass, M.K. (chairman), and Messrs. Aryeh Meir, Zvi Tsilker and Ze'ev Katzenellenbogen, to examine the problem of the "Black Hebrews". In accordance with the letter of appointment, the committee was requested to examine the problem in its entirety, including:

- a) legal aspects of the group's stay in Israel,
- b) their living conditions and employment, and
- c) their relationships with their neighbors.

The committee was asked to submit recommendations to the Minister of the Interior incorporating possible solutions with regard to their future and the way they should be handled.

The committee held several meetings and toured the communities in which the "Black Hebrews" live. Its members spoke with representatives of the Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, Religious Affairs, and Housing and Construction; the Israel Police; the Jewish Agency; mayors and councilmen of the local authorities in Dimona, Arad and Mitzpeh Ramon; prominent citizens and office-holders in those communities, local residents, and leaders of the "Black Hebrews" cult. They also interviewed representatives of the large Jewish organizations in the United States — the American Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Committee — and of the "Black Hebrews" in the United States. In all, the committee heard opinions and evidence from 55 persons.

The committee read extensive background material, research studies, surveys, reports, letters, press-clippings and other material relevant to the subject. The committee's thanks are extended to all the groups, institutions, and individuals who helped them to discharge their duty.

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II IDEOLOGY

The "Black Hebrews" cult has its origins in the identity crisis of the Black population in the United States, aggravated since the beginning of this century by their economic plight, social and cultural inferiority, and by racial discrimination.

There are now some 3,000 religious and pseudo-religious cults in the United States; the majority of whose members are Blacks from the metropolitan ghettos seeking refuge from the above-mentioned problems.

At the end of World War I, small groups of Blacks appeared in Harlem, New York who called themselves Jews, though none of these sects could point to any historic connection whatever with the Jewish people. Moreover, their adherents believed in Jesus. They adopted some Jewish customs and celebrated some Jewish festivals, especially Passover. Groups developed in Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, and Cincinnati. Apparently, it was in this way that the "Black Hebrews" cult arose in Chicago.

Links with Judaism

In his book *The Heritage Seekers*, Israel J. Gerber links the decision of some American Blacks to affiliate with Judaism to their search for identity and roots. Regarding the Christian religion's establishment in the United States as "the white man's church," they saw in Judaism an ancient religion which had provided the civilized world with religious and moral values. Bible stories excited their imagination, so that they could easily identify with the people who had made the exodus from Egypt, from slavery into freedom.

The number of American Blacks who identify themselves as Jews is not known. Estimates range from 15,000 to 100,000 men and women.

According to the journal *Christianity Today*, there are three distinct ideological groups among Black Jews:

- a) The group which believes in the return to Israel as an ideal, if remote, target.
- b) The group which regards its adherents as the true Jews, but believes in Jesus as the prophet of God.
- c) The group which believes in the immediate return to the Land of Israel, since only there can the Messianic vocation be realized. This third group calls itself "Black Israelites," "Black Hebrews," or "The Original Hebrew Israelite Nation," and is the subject of this enquiry. We shall refer to them in this report as the "Black Hebrews."

History of the Cult

The undisputed leader of the cult is Ben-Ami Carter, born in Chicago in 1939, and a bus-driver in his youth. In 1960, he says, a heavenly voice informed him that he had been chosen by Almighty God to take his people out of bondage into freedom. He studied Torah with two black "Rabbis" — Levi Israel and Avihu Reuben. The latter ordained him as a "Rabbi" in 1961 and gave him his

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present Hebrew name. In 1963 Carter became the leader of the group which met for several years in Chicago at a place called "Alpha Beta Israel Hebrew Center."

The group called itself "Grandchildren of the Prince of Peace" (an allusion to their alleged descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), and then merged with another group called "One," founded in Illinois with the declared aim of recognizing the Twelve Tribes of Israel and their history, and restoring human dignity to their descendants. Carter's leadership was accepted by them also and he was called "Father," "Counsellor," and "Righteous Teacher."

Whereas other black groups in Chicago cooperated with the Jewish community and set up the "United Leadership Council of Hebrew Israelites" (ULCHI) in 1967, Carter's group had no contact with local Jewish bodies except for various efforts to obtain funds from the Jewish community to support cult activities.

Principles of Faith

The "Black Hebrews" claim that they are the true Jews, directly descended from the patriarchs and the lost Ten Tribes, who for their sins were condemned to be exiled from the Land of Israel and to wander into West Africa from where they were kidnapped and sold on the slave markets of America.

They regard the Jewish people of today as originating from nations whose rulers compelled them to convert (e.g. the Khazars), with an admixture of other European people. At times, however, they say that the Jews are descended from the Tribe of Judah, as their name would imply.

After expiating their sins in the "New Babel" (United States), they have been summoned by a prophetic voice to return to their birthright, the Land of Israel, which they allege was unjustly seized by the Jews. At best, they regard the Zionists as "trustees" who should now return the "pledge" to its rightful owners. Their goal is to redeem all the Blacks throughout the world from their distress and bring them to Israel, *inter alia* in order to escape "Judgment Day" when America is due to be destroyed.

Carter and his followers argue that in Israel, the vision of the latter days of "the Nation" (the name they give their cult) will be fulfilled, with Ben-Ami Carter as Messiah and Savior.

Religious Duties

They believe only in the Bible commandments and not in the Oral Law, and their ritual is much influenced by the fundamentalist movements to which most of the "Black Hebrews" previously belonged.

They fast from Sabbath eve until the end of the Sabbath, and on Sabbaths and festivals they read chapters from the Bible, sing hymns, and listen to sermons given by Carter.

One unconfirmed report indicated that four years ago, in Dimona, they also celebrated the Moslem Feast of the Sacrifice.

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Some of the men and women wear a fringed garment like the *tzitzit*. They circumcise their sons on the eighth day after birth, but do not employ a *mohel* (ritual circumciser). Polygamy is permitted and, according to Carter, a man is allowed by the Torah to have up to seven wives. The status of women in the cult is inferior to that of the men. They are not allowed to sit together with the men or to address them first. Their main function is to give birth to children and to raise them in the spirit of the cult.

Marriages and divorces are carried out on Carter's instructions. Divorce is announced in the presence of two witnesses without any written *get* (bill of divorcement).

Members refrain from eating meat, fish, and various dairy products, and do not smoke or take strong drink. Watching TV and films is regarded as profane and a waste of time.

The Jewishness of the "Black Hebrews"

The "Black Hebrews" argue that the Law of Return should be applied to them.

When the first group of six arrived in Israel in the spring of 1969, the Ministry of the Interior asked Rabbi Hananya Der'ei to investigate the validity of their claim to be Jews with entitlements under the Law of Return. Since their claim proved to be unfounded, conversion to Judaism was suggested to them and they agreed to the opening of conversion files in the Rabbinical Courts. However, when Carter arrived in March 1970 at the head of a group of 49 adherents of the cult, he rejected the idea of conversion completely, arguing that this would imply admission that the "Black Hebrews" were not in fact Jews.

The cult's claims to be descended from the Hebrews were not based on any historic substantiation. They relied on a few passages in the Bible in which reference was made to a person's black skin (Numbers 12:1, Amos 8:7, Song of Songs 1:5, Job 30:30). In spite of their alleged Marrano-like devotion to Judaism for generations, most of the adult members had been baptized and had belonged to various American churches. Interestingly, a letter sent by Carter to Idi Amin in July 1978 outlines the principles of their faith in one God, the "God of Jacob, Noah, David, Paul and John the Baptist." (Italics added.)

In 1972, a group of eight "Black Hebrews" petitioned the High Court of Israel to order the Minister of the Interior and the Israel Police to grant them immigrant visas under the Law of Return, claiming that they fell within the definition of "Jew" under that Law. In their affidavit, they claimed that the land had been promised to them for eternity, and that they were the true Jews returning to the Promised land "in which the State of Israel of today is located."

The High Court rejected their petition unequivocally, pointing out that they did not meet the criteria set forth in the Law, namely, that their mothers were Jewish, or that they were converted to Judaism. Moreover, there was an open question as to whether they did not belong to a religion other than Judaism.

This committee's conclusions coincide completely with the findings of the High Court. No in-depth historical research is required to show that the "Black Hebrews" never had any connection or affiliation with the Jewish people, and that their "religious revival" dates back, at most, to the last few decades.

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group of "racialist anti-Semites." It was reported that as many as 300 Dimona residents joined Rabbi Kahana's league after this meeting.

Following protests from the leading citizens of Dimona, the Minister of the Interior promised, in September 1971, that a decision with regard to the future of the "Black Hebrews" would be taken "within a week or ten days." In 1973, after the High Court had requested the Government to consider favorably the request of the "Black Hebrews" to remain in Israel, the militancy of the cult's leaders gave way to an information campaign directed at public opinion in Israel and the United States. An appeal was made to the members to maintain orderly relations with their neighbors.

During and after the Yom Kippur War, the cult made an effort to display solidarity with the State of Israel and the IDF. Their troupe of "soul-music" singers visited army units and was given an enthusiastic welcome. However, tensions soon re-appeared and many neighbors of the "Black Hebrews" began to sell their apartments, at much below the market price, in order to move elsewhere.

To our regret, we read in a letter dated October 21, 1976 from the Shechunat Ha-Nitzahon (Dimona) Committee, that relationships between the "Black Hebrews" and their Jewish neighbors had deteriorated so that "instead of neighborly and brotherly relationships, there is alienation, animosity, lack of faith, fear, and lack of dialogue."

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IV STRUCTURE OF THE CULT

The "Black Hebrews" cult is formally led by 12 "Princes" (that having been the number of the tribes of Israel). In practice, the leadership is composed of the following ten persons:

1. President Ben-Ami Carter (formerly Ben Carter)
2. Vice-president Shalik (Shaliah) Ben-Yehudah (formerly Louis Joe Bryant)
3. Vice-president Bechuriah Ben-Israel (formerly Travis Moore)
4. Vice-president Elijah Ben-Israel (formerly Ronald Ross)
5. Gabriel Ben-Israel (formerly William Butler)
6. Seymour Ben-Israel (formerly I. Inchos)
7. Hezekiah Ben-Israel (formerly Charles Blackwell)
8. "Little" Gabriel (formerly Gordon Darwin)
9. Absalom Ben-Israel (formerly Roosevelt Poynter)
10. Amram Ben-Israel (original name not known).

(Note: All the members of the cult assumed Hebrew names because they regarded their previous names as a "mark of Cain" given them when they were enslaved by their white masters.)

The two large concentrations of the sect — apart from the Dimona community led by Carter — have local leaders: Charles Blackwell in Arad, and William Butler (Gabriel Ben Israel) in Mitzpeh Ramon. (The latter is known as "Big" Gabriel, as contrasted with "Little" Gabriel, also one of the leaders of the cult.)

The Council of Princes also includes ministers of various portfolios on behalf of "The Nation": e.g., Prime Minister; Minister for Foreign Affairs Shalik Ben-Yehudah, who is regarded as No. 2 in the hierarchy after Carter; a Minister of Defense who is in charge of internal security; a Minister of Justice who is responsible for the cult's internal judiciary; a Minister of Education (a woman) who directs the schools for the cult's children; and a Minister of Finance who is responsible for financial administration.

Carter — Absolute Ruler

It is an error to imagine that the cult is governed collectively by the Council of Princes, though this may appear to be so at first sight. Ben-Ami Carter is the all-powerful leader who decides everything, big and small matters alike. His flock call him "Ben-Ami Israel," "Prince of Princes," "Father," "Our Master." They bow down before him when they pass, and every word he utters is holy for the members of the cult. He establishes the internal laws of the cult and serves as supreme arbiter of disputes. He also decides who shall marry whom, and conducts marriages and divorce proceedings for the members of his community.

All contacts with outside bodies are made by Carter himself. Only rarely does he permit one of the other Princes to be interviewed by the media.

This was made clear to the committee when it visited Mitzpeh Ramon and Arad, and met with leaders of the cult in Dimona and Jerusalem. When the committee toured Mitzpeh Ramon and sought to visit apartments occupied by members of the cult, the "Black Hebrews" refused to allow this on the

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ground that without explicit approval from the "President" (Carter), it was forbidden for them to have any contact whatsoever with "strangers." Nor did they answer questions put by members of this committee. In Arad, too, the committee paid a surprise visit to the homes of the "Black Hebrews," where they met with definite non-cooperation. In neither case did the presence of the heads of the local council, persons well-known to the members of the cult, persuade them to open their homes to the committee members or to engage in conversation.

When the committee held meetings in Dimona and Jerusalem with leaders of the cult, their sole spokesman was Ben-Ami Carter. Moreover, even when committee members asked questions directly of members of the cult's leadership, they were always referred back to Carter.

Internal Discipline

Discipline within the cult is very strict, and when disputes arise, they are brought for adjudication to an internal court, never to the legal authorities of the State of Israel. The Israel Police claims that members who violate the laws of the cult are subject to sentences which include corporal punishment, confiscation of passports, and excommunication from the cult. The police are convinced that many of the women who were persuaded to emigrate to Israel are held here against their will, and all efforts on the part of their relatives in the United States to establish contact with them end in failure.

In a series of articles in the *Jerusalem Post* (January 1979) on the "Black Hebrews," rumors are cited regarding mysterious disappearances of men and women members, imprisonment of "offenders," beatings, child abuse, and confiscation of passports. The newspaper relies particularly on evidence given by one "M" who broke away from the cult. According to him, men have been beaten for refusing to go to work or for being lazy. Another punishment was to send people to wander for forty days in the wilderness. A Dimona housewife who lives close to the cult told the correspondent that a number of people had suddenly disappeared, and that she had seen bodies being carried out of the houses in the dead of night. She stated that another form of punishment employed by the cult's leaders was to shave the heads of men, women, and children who violated the laws of the community. Other neighbors, stated the newspaper, tell of widespread child-beating. Children, even toddlers, who accept sweets from strangers are cruelly beaten.

In testimony before the committee, the Jewish neighbors of the "Black Hebrews" did not make any complaints of this kind; thus the Committee is unable to decide if there is any truth in the above-mentioned accusations.

It would appear that the accusations regarding cruel punishments are exaggerated if not entirely unsubstantiated. A member of the Israel Police who lives close to the apartments occupied by the "Black Hebrews" in Dimona, and who is better informed than most about what goes on within the cult, denied in his evidence before the committee that a severe penal system, including physical sanctions, existed.

The committee had a lengthy conversation in the Neveh Tirza Women's Prison with one of the cult's women, prior to her deportation to the United States following a theft she committed in the Arad supermarket. The woman, who was very intelligent, replied very frankly to the questions put by the committee members, and impressed them with the truth of her statements. This woman had been excommunicated from the cult because of her criminal conviction, a fact which reinforced her credibility. She absolutely denied reports of the use of corporal punishment, stating that the punishments

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inflicted were of a moral and social character. According to her, the discipline prevailing in the cult was the result of strong, inner faith in the justice of the community and blind trust in Carter, its leader. She said that the rigid social framework, and the desire of every member to prove himself within the community, were the main deterrents to violations of State law or of the ordinances of the community itself. (When we asked: "Then why did you steal an avocado?", she answered: "I was very hungry.")

As far as punishment of minors is concerned, the committee had before it a report from a social worker regarding a ten-year-old boy who had run away from Dimona after a quarrel with his parents. The enquiry showed that there was no more physical punishment of children in the cult than is customary in parent-child relationships in the society at large.

Because of their desire to keep a low profile and not to give the authorities an excuse to deport them from Israel, the leaders of the cult are in the habit of expelling members who have clashed with the law. There were also cases in which a few men and women had left the cult of their own free will. Their exact number is not known, but does not appear to be large, particularly in view of the difficult conditions in which the "Black Hebrews" find themselves.

The committee was unable to determine whether individuals are held within the cult against their express will. Neither the police nor neighbors who made such claims produced any evidence to substantiate this.

In summarizing this section, it should be pointed out that the committee, in the course of its deliberations, met hundreds of "Black Hebrew" men, women, and children. The general impression was of healthy people who are happy with their lot. As far as one can judge, one could say that rumors about abuse and a regime of threats are apparently unfounded. At any rate, not a single shred of concrete evidence was brought before us which would contradict this conclusion.

In this connection, it must be added that after these lines were written, the committee chairman, who was visiting the United States, received information from a man who had left the cult and returned to the U.S. The man, who insisted on anonymity for fear of reprisals against him, said that "the members of the cult are under the absolute rule of Ben-Ami Carter, imposed by virtue of his personality and a regime of fear and terror. . . many members of the cult would like to return to the United States, but are afraid to do so because of the regime of terror imposed by Carter."

Regarding the aims of the leadership, the man stated (and this is also recorded in writing):

The "Black Hebrews" are organized like the Georgetown sect and even worse. Whereas the Georgetown people did not want to harm the state in which they lived, the "Black Hebrews" organize themselves as a self-contained "state" which does not recognize the State of Israel.

The short - and long - term plan of the cult's leadership is to establish themselves, bring thousands of Blacks into Israel, and then implement their sovereignty by carrying out many evil deeds which are likely to cause injury to Israel, its character and independence. . . the aim is to bring more and more of their people to Israel, to create facts, and to establish a strong potential for carrying out their purposes. Most of the members of the cult are, it is true, motivated by pure religious feelings, but some of the leaders are corrupt and, after indoctrinating their followers, persuade them to carry out thefts, embezzlements, and smuggling operations in order to remit funds or the equivalent thereof to the leaders and the "Black Hebrews" in Israel, and to step up their migration to Israel.*

* This is a translation of the Hebrew text of the committee's report.

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"Black Hebrews" as a Cult

We describe the "Black Hebrews" as a "cult." The *New York Times*, in January 1979 (as reported in the *Jerusalem Post*), lists a number of characteristics common to the three hundred cults which now exist in the United States:

1. At the head of the cult stands a charismatic leader who claims to have new revelations from on-high. His words are holy, and those who do not follow him are regarded as heretics.
2. The leader creates a new framework, often a "commune," in which the members of the cult live together, often adopting new names and cutting themselves off completely from their "original" families.
3. The leader establishes the laws of the cult, although he may not always observe them himself.
4. The cult develops an apocalyptic *weltanschauung*, in accordance with which accepted moral laws are eliminated upon the order of the leader.
5. The leader uses sophisticated methods to supervise his flock. Whereas the members of the cult itself see them as the means to achieve a religious regime, an outside observer would define them as brain-washing.

Without doubt, this definition applies in general terms to the "Black Hebrews" in Israel, and must be taken into account in any discussion of the problem and of suggested methods for solving it. To judge this phenomenon by norms which are accepted in other social groups would be misleading. Tragic proof of this was given to the world in November 1978, when more than 800 members of the "People's Temple" cult in Guyana carried out a ceremonial mass suicide on the order of their leader. The lesson to be learned from that tragedy is that special methods must be adopted to handle these various cults. A balance must be sought between protection of the interests of society as a whole against these deviant groups, and tolerance of them within the norms of law. Any extreme approach, one way or the other, is likely to miss the target and even cause a disaster. This, too, was a consideration weighed by the committee.

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V LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE CULT IN ISRAEL

Housing

At present, the cult's housing conditions in Dimona, Arad, and Mitzpeh Ramon are intolerably congested. Twenty or more "Black Hebrews" live in a single apartment of 64 square meters or even 42 square meters. On the average, there are at least ten persons to a single room. The population density in the homes of the "Black Hebrews" in Shechunat Ha-Nitzahon in Dimona is at least *five times higher* than the local average.

These sub-standard housing conditions — unparalleled either in Israel or in slum areas abroad — constitute, in the view of this committee, the prime cause of tension between the members of the cult and their Jewish neighbors. True, this problem was largely created by the nature of the cult, but the national and local authorities cannot be exempted from responsibility for these conditions which have no place in an orderly society.

Jewish neighbors of the "Black Hebrews" have for some years now voiced severe complaints about this housing congestion, which results in the blocking-up of sewers, overflowing garbage cans, excess noise, etc., and a general lowering of the quality of life.

As a result of these conditions, many Jewish families left the district, apartment prices slumped, and even then there was no demand for empty apartments in the neighborhood of "Black Hebrew" apartments.

Health Conditions

From the time of their arrival in the country, the "Black Hebrews" were offered all the medical and public health facilities that are available to the general population of Israel. They declined to make use of them, arguing that they had trained doctors and nurses within the cult to attend to their medical needs. A year ago, however, they were accepted as members of the General Federation of Labor (*Histadrut*), with entitlement to *Kupat Holim* (sick fund) services. They use these only on rare occasions.

Local nurses have not succeeded in persuading the "Black Hebrews" to bring their babies for care at the local Mother and Child Health Stations. Their own midwives deliver the "Black Hebrew" women at home; births often take place in the shelters below their homes the labor pains being accompanied by beating of African drums. Their births are not registered in the Ministry of the Interior, nor is the exact number of deaths among them known. There are thirty graves in the cemetery allotted to "Black Hebrews" by the local authority, but the District Health Office in Beersheba has only issued three death certificates.

Although their homes are kept scrupulously clean, the Ministry of Health has frequently warned that the terrible congestion in which they live is likely to lead to serious health problems, epidemics, etc.

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Education

The "Black Hebrews" maintain an independent "Kingdom School" in Dimona, which also serves their children from Arad and Mitzpeh Ramon. It is housed in various rooms in their quarter and in one of the shelters, in congested conditions.

Mr. Amitai Meir, regional community work coordinator for the *Histadrut*, reported after a visit to the school in 1976 that the children study Hebrew and arithmetic as well as abstract subjects which have the character of ethical-religious spiritualism, based largely on the Bible according to the cult's interpretation. The teachers, all members of the cult, state that they are graduates of American colleges. In a room no more than twelve square meters in size, as many as twelve children were studying. Another room served fifteen boys and girls, ages 10-13. In a shelter (area: twenty square meters), twenty-five teen-agers (14-18) of both sexes were studying.

Mr. Meir was impressed with the discipline of the children in the classrooms, the quiet which prevailed, their clean if simple dress, and their attitude of respect for adults.

Their school system is not under inspection as required by the laws of Israel, this being an outcome of their undefined legal status within the State of Israel.

Ben-Ami Carter told the committee that they would be prepared to send their children to government schools and kindergartens if the latter were ready to accept them.

Employment and Sources of Income

The "Black Hebrews" derive their income from a) their own work and b) donations from abroad. All the members of the cult are resident illegally in Israel, and since they do not have work permits they are not registered at the local labor exchange. Thus, firms which employ them do so on a temporary basis, often for inferior wages and in violation of the law. Many of the men are employed by private contractors as unskilled laborers in the Dead Sea region, Dimona, and the Arava. In Mitzpeh Ramon, the local council employs some of them in maintenance and gardening jobs. An important source of income is their "Soul Music" Troupe, headed by Charles Blackwell and comprising thirty male and female singers. In Dimona they maintain jewelry and leather workshops and a shop which sells natural foods.

Nevertheless, the committee is of the view that the bulk of their income derives from contributions from abroad, especially from American Blacks who sympathize with the plight of the "Black Hebrews" in Israel, as publicized.

There is also evidence that, on joining the cult, the members transfer all their financial resources to its leaders (perhaps not always in legal ways). All their income is transferred to a central fund controlled by the "Minister of Finance," and is distributed to the various families according to need. All their needs, including food, are subsidized from this communal fund.

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VI OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW, AND CRIMINAL INVOLVEMENT

The committee paid special attention to the question of observance of the law by the cult members.

One aspect of this problem concerns violations of the law deriving from their "illegal residence" in Israel; this relates to population registration regulations, education, employment, health, etc. One must add to these their illegal efforts to secure unauthorized entry into the country. A second aspect of the problem concerns the degree of "ordinary" criminality among members of the cult. A letter of complaint addressed to the Prime Minister on September 10, 1978 by residents of Arad, stated: "The 'Black Hebrews' are not descendants of the Falashas, but consist of American and Ethiopian criminals."

A petition lodged by house committees in Shechunat Ha-Nitzahon, Dimona, stresses that "since their arrival in the country, there have been many clashes between the 'Black Hebrews' and the law, and many complaints lodged against them, *inter alia*, for cases of manslaughter, assault of policemen, thefts, illegal assembly, fraud, disturbance of the peace, noise, impersonation, issuing a false document, obtaining goods by fraud, forgery, etc."

These statements, largely copied from the report of the Special Duties Department of the Investigations Division of the Israel Police (January 1978), would seem to be a distortion and exaggeration of the facts. In all, from their arrival in 1969 until mid-1973, 18 complaints were lodged against "Black Hebrews," including *one single case* of the killing of a member of the cult by other members, apparently because of an internal quarrel.

From mid-1973 to date, the position has been as follows, according to the above-mentioned police report:

Following upon the arrest and deportation of some of the members, their leaders imposed stricter discipline with a view to their not giving the authorities an excuse for deporting them. This led to a dramatic decline in the number of criminal acts. In every case of a criminal offense, the leaders actually offer their cooperation to the police against the offender, in order to avoid harassment of the cult as a whole.

In all, five cases involving "Black Hebrews" in crimes were recorded in recent years, none of them especially serious. It should be borne in mind that conviction of a "Black Hebrew" leads either to deportation from Israel by the authorities, or to automatic excommunication by the leadership of the cult. A senior police officer from the Southern District testified to the committee that *the crime rate among the "Black Hebrews" is lower than among the Jews.*

A difficult problem which is related to both crime and national security arises from the fact that the members of the cult do not hold identity cards as do Israeli citizens. Nor do they carry passports with them. Some were destroyed, and others were apparently given for safekeeping to the leaders of the cult. The heads of the cult issued their own "identity cards" in 1975 with photographs attached. These "Temporary Identity Cards" state that: "The bearer of this certificate... has no permanent identity card because status of the group of Israeli Hebrews has not yet been determined officially in Israel." The police suspect that some of the "Black Hebrews" change their identity as needed. The lack of registration and formal identification may enable criminal offenders to succeed in evading the arm of the law, and even to disappear entirely. More than a year ago, the police filed thirty prosecutions in the Beersheba Court against "Black Hebrews" for not carrying identity cards, and for illegal residence in Israel. The intention was to use these as a test case for the entire cult.

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These cases are still pending, because the authorities came to the conclusion that the subject requires solution at the public level, and is connected with broader issues involving the "Black Hebrews."

The police also considered the possibility of finger-printing "Black Hebrews" on entry to Israel. This idea was dropped when it was found that legally, this cannot be requested of a person entering Israel as long as he has not been arrested on some criminal charge. Moreover, any new regulation of this kind would have to be made applicable to all those entering Israel, without distinction.

The Security Problem

Are the "Black Hebrews" a security risk? Their Jewish neighbors say, "Yes." According to them, and this is confirmed by the above-mentioned police report, members of the cult and especially the women, train with sticks in karate and ju-jitsu exercises. Their leaders claim that the long staffs carried by many of the men are "the staffs of wandering" which symbolize their journeys until they reached the Promised Land. There are also unsubstantiated rumors that the cult possesses fire-arms. According to the police, the men maintain a tight patrolling system at night and whenever a police car is summoned to their area, an unusual level of alertness is discerned amongst them.

The Jewish residents fear the "Black Hebrews" hostility towards the State, and the danger of their cooperating with the enemy in time of emergency. A local resident told the committee that a member of the cult "had said to him that a day will come which will be worse than the Yom Kippur War, and then they will take over Dimona." Other local people said they were worried that in an emergency, when the Jewish men are called up, their women and children would be left behind at the mercy of an alienated and hostile group.

In their memorandum to the Prime Minister, the Arad residents wrote:

Above everything else, we are worried by the fact that the members of the cult live their lives as a state-within-a-state, without any reference or obedience to the laws of the State of Israel. Their men undergo a kind of military training; for what purpose? The members of the cult and their leaders declare that they are the legal owners of the Land and will do everything to concretize those rights. Is this the purpose of the "military" training which arouses the anxiety of the local residents?

The cult leaders deny vigorously the allegation that they have any hostile intentions whatever vis-a-vis Israel and its citizens. According to Ben-Ami Carter, they regard themselves as Israelis for all intents and purposes, and are acting kindly toward the State in return for the unkindness meted out to them. He said that during the Yom Kippur War they volunteered for many duties, and still continue to do so.

Carter has many letters from Army units expressing thanks for the entertainment performances given by the "Black Hebrew" song-troupe for soldiers during and after the war, as well as other letters about sports events, and school visits to the cult's residences in Dimona.

In another section, we shall discuss the contacts maintained by the cult with elements abroad, including some which are unfriendly, to say the least, to Israel. To date, no contact has been discovered with any hostile group, for the purpose of actively injuring the State of Israel in any way. However, the very existence of a closed, mystic cult with a strong motivation and an ideology based on the assumption that the "Black Hebrews" are the true masters of the Land, obliges the authorities to maintain a security alert regarding the activities of the cult.

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Criminal Activity in the United States

Whereas the criminal activities of the cult members in Israel are of a limited nature, as has been stated, there is considerable suspicion regarding the criminal activity of persons who belong to the "Black Hebrew" cult in the United States. According to certain evidence, these individuals have reached Israel and have found refuge in the concentrations of the cult here.

In 1973, the Israeli Consulate in Chicago issued a warning that, according to well-informed sources, some persons "wanted" on criminal charges had succeeded in infiltrating into Israel, and that in the Black communities in the United States, Dimona and Arad had become known as "cities of refuge" where one could escape from the arm of the law, creditors, or relatives. There, so it was said, one could turn over a new leaf by changing one's name and adopting a new identity.

In April 1977, the *Chicago Tribune* carried a series of articles which attracted wide attention in the American media, on investigations carried out in the city by the FBI, the Chicago police, and the Federal Treasury and Postal Departments, with regard to the defrauding of banks, supermarkets, and others of sums ranging from six to ten million dollars, between 1975 and 1977. The investigation concentrated on a community residing in South Chicago — so the reports stated — and calling itself "Black Hebrews." According to the FBI, the Community numbered some 500 souls, including fifty persons suspected of criminal offenses. The newspaper stated that eight to ten city banks had been harmed by fraudulent acts such as issuing checks without cover. Large food and diamond shops had suffered from the use of stolen credit cards. The group was in the habit of infiltrating its members into "promising" places of work, where they could engage in stealing checks, credit cards, and other documents.

One of the leaders of the group, Bernard Bradley, tried to enter Israel, but was caught and sent back to the United States. He was arrested by the American authorities and charged with theft, holding stolen goods, forging checks, and travelling to another country in order to escape trial. In another case, five members of the group were identified when they were automatically photographed as they presented checks in a jewelry shop. When the Police tried to locate and arrest them, it transpired that they had left for Israel. Several Chicago travel agents complained to the police that round-trip trickets to Israel had been bought from them with stolen credit cards.

According to the *Chicago Tribune*, the leaders of the group encourage their members to adopt methods of this kind in order to achieve the exalted aim of helping the lost tribes of Israel now returning to their homeland. According to the investigating journalists, parents were at first happy that their children were engaged in some kind of social activity within the framework of the group instead of loitering in the streets, but they often found themselves the victims of their own children. One father said that his daughter had stolen \$3,000 from him before she left for Israel. A woman related that her sister had stolen \$45,000 from the bank in which she worked, before escaping to Israel. Another man said that one day he found that all his cash, credit cards and checks had disappeared. It turned out that his 18-year-old daughter had bought goods to the value of \$8,000 with his credit cards, cashed checks for \$3,000, and *inter alia* bought tickets to Israel for herself and another five members of the group.

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According to police, there were dozens of similar cases between 1975 and 1977, with the damage caused by fraud and thefts amounting to six to ten million dollars. In the opinion of the police, most of the suspects are now in Israel.

The committee received evidence showing that not only have these activities not ceased, they have even increased during the last year. The "Black Hebrews" in the United States are under the constant surveillance of the FBI but, surprisingly enough, none of the suspects appears to have been brought to trial, so far.

It is the committee's view that the Israel Police, in cooperation with the law-enforcement authorities of the United States, should make every effort to trace the offenders who have fled to Israel, and extradite them to their country of origin.

At the same time, there is ground for believing that the American authorities are in no hurry to take steps to bring these criminal elements back to their country and, *post factum*, they are satisfied that the burden of this problem has been removed from them.

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VII "BLACK HEBREW" PROPAGANDA

The information and propaganda activities of the cult abroad have been very intensive during the last ten years. They are concentrated in two areas:

1. The dissemination of the principles of the cult among Blacks, especially in the United States and on the African continent.
2. An anti-Israel and occasionally anti-Jewish propaganda campaign, which began in 1971 and died down in mid-1978, as will be explained later.

Information Program

Material on the cult's beliefs has been circulated from the two main centers in Dimona and Chicago to Black communities throughout the world, especially in the United States and in Africa. Pamphlets and proclamations describe the tenets of the cult, and invite readers to join their ranks. It is worth stressing that the reputation of the cult has spread widely among the American Blacks. Although few join it, there is an awareness of, and even identification with, the "sufferings" of the cult in Israel on the part of many Blacks, especially persons in leadership positions.

The main center of activity in Chicago is the one to which potential emigrants to Israel are directed. There they are given financial aid to help them reach Israel in any way possible. According to reports, an extensive information program is also carried out in a number of African countries. Thomas Glover, one of the outstanding leaders of the cult who was expelled from Israel in July 1973, set up a "Black Hebrew" center in Ghana, established close contacts with leaders of that country, and spread the word of his cult with the aid of local educational and religious institutions.

The activities of the cult also spread to Liberia, Ethiopia, Mali, Togo, Nigeria, and South Africa. In Togo, for example, a plot of land was acquired by one of the churches for a "Black Hebrew" center and mission. Such centers, beyond serving instructional purposes, provide meeting-places for potential emigrants to Israel, whose desire to emigrate derives from the economic crisis in their countries no less than from their devotion to the principles of the cult. According to a police report in 1978 the cult also extended its activity to Greece. There, their representatives contact Blacks who have reached Greece from the United States and African countries, and attempt to persuade them to go and live in Israel.

Anti-Israel Propaganda

Anti-Israel propaganda activity began to appear in 1970 and became more intensive the following year. After the waves of enthusiasm regarding the arrival of the first "Black Hebrews" in Israel had subsided, the Israeli authorities became aware of the danger involved in the migration of hundreds and thousands of members of the cult to Israel. The gates of Israel were closed to them, housing and work opportunities were limited, and tensions and hostility escalated between the "Black Hebrews" and their Jewish neighbors.

The leadership of the cult — in particular Ben-Ami Carter and Shalik Ben-Yehudah — opened up a

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propaganda offensive against the State and its authorities. This propaganda was diversified. It reached out to the media (especially the Black press), to conferences organized by the cult in the United States, and to various public bodies abroad, including groups hostile to Israel.

Herewith are some samples of the hate-propaganda which appeared in the media, underground papers, and posters in the matter of the "Black Hebrews".

Interviewed in the *Baltimore Sun* (November 6, 1971), Ben-Ami Carter warned that "Maybe 2,000,000, maybe many more, will come from the United States in order to rescue the Land of Israel from its Jewish inhabitants, because God ordered me to take control of the State of Israel." (Later, in an interview in *Yediot Aharonot*, December 31, 1971, Carter denied that he had ever declared that the "Black Hebrews" would drive the Jews out of Israel. At the same time, he argued that the Government of Israel would not last long because it was not a true government.)

In the cult's journal, *Sunday Sun-Times* (September 25, 1977), Jewish residents of Chicago are accused of money-grabbing and of exploiting the Christian population.

In one of the clippings, it is stated: "Money is the God of the sinful, white Jewish dogs." A picture of the Prime Minister of Israel is captioned: "Menahem Begin — the spirit of Hitler."

In an underground, Black paper in San Francisco (September 1977), an A.P. report is quoted to the effect that a group of Blacks who had reached Israel faced expulsion because they had come in the guise of pilgrims. The writer continues:

The Jews carry out the very kind of abominable deeds which they claim Hitler perpetrated. They are the same Jews who stole the Palestinians' homeland and drove them out like animals into refugee camps where they are living in inhuman conditions. . . . let us tear away the veil from these Israeli criminals.

According to the *Jerusalem Post*, the Black Radio Station in Chicago devoted many programs to the cult and referred to "our brother Sadat and his expected war to kill the evil beast." (These broadcasts, of course, ante-dated the peace talks with Egypt.)

In a brochure issued by Shalik Ben-Yehudah in 1973 to promote his book *From America to the Promised Land*, the "Minister for Foreign Affairs" of the cult lists a whole string of complaints against acts of discrimination and oppression on the part of the Israeli authorities (most of them without a vestige of truth in them). The Israel Police is called "Gestapo police" in this brochure.

The brochure does not confine itself to attacking Israel. It contains anti-Semitic incitement against American Jews, and the aid given by the United States to Israel:

We should remind our Black brethren that 500 million dollars of the American tax-payers' money have been given to the racist regime in Israel without any protest forthcoming from the Black community. In addition, 800 million dollars collected by the United Jewish Appeal was in most part stolen from the Blacks by money-grabbing Jewish merchants. . . . We call upon our Black brethren to rise up against the Jewish subjection of our community. These same racist Jews have got control of all the arteries of our economic life. . . .

The brochure concludes with an appeal for a general boycott of Jewish businesses in the United States, and the termination of all American Government support for the State of Israel, whether direct or via the United Jewish Appeal.

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These are just a few samples of the propaganda material issued by the cult itself or under its inspiration.

Approaches to Conferences and International Groups

Throughout the years, the leaders of the cult multiplied their contacts with various international bodies. In April 1971, according to the article in *Yediot Aharonot*, they sent a petition to the U.N. Sub-Committee on Human Rights, in which they demanded recognition of their right to settle in the Land of Israel and to be a third-party to the Middle East dispute, in addition to the Arabs and the Israelis.

On November 16, 1971, some 500 young people attended a conference held by the cult in Philadelphia to plan their political campaign. Two delegates were present from the "advance force in Dimona," and the "national" flag was raised, showing a lion of Judah surrounded by the symbols of the Twelve Tribes against a blue background.

On November 28, 1972, Ben-Ami Carter wrote an open letter to Kurt Waldheim, Secretary-General of the United Nations, complaining against the U.N. decision to set up a Jewish State in the territory of the Land of Israel. He wrote, *inter alia*:

The Jews from Europe are not the true Hebrews to whom the land was promised by prophetic vision. . . . World Zionist propaganda is to blame for the land being stolen from the rightful owners, the "Black Hebrews". . . . The U.N. gave legitimacy to this situation and must bear the responsibility for the serious consequences. The U.N. must recognize the national right of the "Black Hebrews" as a people in the Land of Israel. . . .

On September 24 and November 30, 1973, the leaders of the cult sent letters to President Nixon, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and the American Ambassador in Israel, Kenneth Keating, with copies to the President of the U.S.S.R., Leonid Brezhnev, and the Secretary-General of the U.N. They demanded forthrightly in this letter that they be invited to take part in the Geneva Peace Conference at the end of December 1973, as "the true representative of the State of Israel." This request was in the spirit of Ben-Ami Carter's earlier complaint that the Government of Israel had not consulted him in March 1972 when King Hussein proposed the setting up of a Palestinian State on the West Bank. The entire Knesset, he said, should come to Dimona to hear his opinion on this subject.

On December 31, 1973, the cult sent a memorandum, similar in content to the above-mentioned propaganda brochure issued by Shalik Ben-Yehudah, to all the Black representatives in the United States Congress. In it the authorities of Israel were accused of falsely imprisoning the "Black Hebrews" and of playing fast and loose with innocent members of the cult. The memorandum drew attention to the fact that a substantial part of the one billion dollars granted to Israel came from Black taxpayers and at the expense of the advancement of social projects for the welfare of American Blacks. It urged the following steps: boycott of all Jewish businesses in the United States; setting up a lobby of Black representatives to work for the termination of all American aid to Israel; detailed investigation of the detention of members of the cult in Ramleh Prison and their immediate release. (This appeal did not prevent Shalik Ben-Yehudah from writing, on another occasion, that "the Black representatives in Washington are under the absolute control of the Jews.") In later interviews in the Israeli and American press in 1974, he said that the true rulers of the American financial establishment were the Jews, not the "white Christians," and he quoted Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

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In October 1977, Azriel Ben-Israel, so-called "International Ambassador of the Nation," called upon all supporters of the cult's "Idea" in the U.S. to demand cessation of all U.S. aid in money, arms, and food to Israel, a boycott of all Jewish-owned businesses and Jewish political candidates by the U.S. Blacks, the severance of all Black church contacts with Israel, the end of American tourism to Israel, legal action for a "test case" against the United Jewish Appeal, and international sanctions against the State of Israel.

Has the Anti-Israel Propaganda Campaign Stopped?

It would appear that an "armistice" was achieved in 1978 between the cult and the Israel authorities, on the initiative of prominent American-Jewish organizations. Though this may have led to a lessening of public attacks, the leaders of the cult have continued to denounce the State of Israel to various international bodies. A prominent example was the letter sent by Shalik Ben-Yehudah, second only to Ben-Ami Carter in the hierarchy of the cult, to Uganda's dictator, Idi Amin, protesting against the denial by the reactionary authorities in Israel of the elementary rights of the "Black Hebrews."

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VIII THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE PROBLEM

The main cause of the current problems connected with the "Black Hebrews" has been the ostrich-like inaction of the Government of Israel. When the first groups arrived in the country, it might have been possible to handle the problem with speed and decision.

While it is possible to understand the naiveté with which the first group from Liberia was received in Israel, this could not be said with regard to the large group which later arrived at Lod (see p. 6 above), and were granted tourist visas for three months, as well as various absorption facilities. It is said that the decision not to deny them admission was taken at a time close to the national elections in Israel, when the issue of "Who is a Jew?" was a sensitive subject for public debate. In this committee's view, such political "caution" was the first in a chain of errors in the Government's handling of this problem.

When it became clear that the "Black Hebrews" were not Jews, efforts were made to suggest that they convert to Judaism, but this was rejected by Ben-Ami Carter who arrived on March 6, 1970 at the head of a group of 49. As stated previously, they were granted tourist visas, but not the usual absorption facilities of housing and work permits. Most of this group were women and children who were without financial resources, had been expelled from Liberia, and said they sought reunion with their families in Dimona. This was granted on humanitarian grounds, in spite of doubts as to the veracity of all their statements. The former Mayor of Dimona, Yitzhak Peretz, M.K., has said that the Government was deterred from deporting this group because they arrived about the same time several presidents of African states and presidents of Black universities in the United States were visiting Israel.

When it became clear that the "Black Hebrews" rejected the idea of conversion to Judaism, the proposal to deport them was reconsidered, but was deferred "until things quieted down."

After further representations from the cult's Jewish neighbors, an inter-ministerial consultation took place in October 1971, at which three options were discussed:

- a) to regard them as temporary residents,
- b) to regard them as undesirables and to deport them by order of the Minister of the Interior,
- c) not to recognize them as temporary residents and not to deport them, but to leave them in the position of "tolerated" persons.

The third option was accepted with regard to those already in Israel; and it was decided that no more members of the cult would be allowed into the country. The Ministry of the Interior subsequently did not renew the tourist visas held by the "Black Hebrews" in the country, thus acquiescing to the group's continued illegal residence in Israel, with all the serious consequences that flowed from such a situation. A further group of 48 "Black Hebrews" who arrived in Israel on October 8, 1971, was denied entry and repatriated to the United States.

Attempts at Deportation from Israel

Any criminal conviction of a member of the cult leads to immediate deportation from Israel.

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Fifty deportation orders were issued by the Israel authorities in 1973 but were not effective, either because the leaders of the cult went underground, or because of the objective difficulties in tracing persons who do not have identity cards and frequently change their residence. An additional complication was the notice served by several members of the cult on the American Consuls in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem that they wished to waive their American citizenship. Now stateless according to American law, it was impossible to deport them to the United States or to any other country that was not ready to absorb them. By January 1978, 72 "Black Hebrews" had waived their American citizenship.

From 1973 to 1976, the Government of Israel negotiated on this matter with the Government of the United States. It was finally agreed, in July 1976, that the U.S. Embassy in Israel would cooperate with Israel as follows: "Black Hebrews" who faced deportation orders would be divided into those who held U.S. citizenship, and those who had waived that citizenship. Regarding individuals in the first group, the United States would contact the person's family in the U.S. to provide financial assistance for the journey to the U.S.; if the answer proved to be negative, the U.S. Government would advance the fare as a loan. A person in the second category would apply for an immigration visa, which would be granted by the American Consulate, but no financial aid would be forthcoming from the U.S. Government.

Even these proposals, though far from satisfactory, were not carried out in practice, because of American reluctance to deal actively with the matter and lack of pressure from the Israel Government which, from the outset, had negotiated at too low a level instead of addressing its demands to senior echelons of the American administration.

Mass Infiltration into Israel

Based upon powers established in the Law of Entry into Israel (1952), the Israel Police closely examines the circumstances under which Black persons seek entry into Israel, e.g. the validity of the passport held, the existence of a return ticket to the land of origin, financial resources, and the purpose of the visit to Israel. Only if it is clear that there is no intention to join the "Black Hebrews" is entry permitted. The defect in this procedure is that it may cause hardship and distress from time to time to bona fide Black visitors to Israel, including devoted friends of Israel, Black clergy, university lecturers, sportsmen, etc., and present a negative image of Israel to the outside world.

However, members of the cult have found ways to deceive the authorities, by arriving under the guise of Christian pilgrims to the Holy Places, with return tickets, and sufficient money for their stay in Israel. Some claimed to be attending seminars in Israel. Most of these groups disappear once they have reached Israel, and it is thought that they finally join up with the "Black Hebrews" in the south.

Lack of Attention to the Problem at High Governmental Levels

Until the appointment of this committee by the Minister of the Interior, there was no discussion of how to handle this problem at ministerial level.

Eight years after the arrival of the first group, the Director-General of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs convened a meeting (November 7, 1977) of directors-general of the Ministries of Labor, Health,

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Housing and Welfare, the assistant directors-general of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and other senior officials. This was the first comprehensive discussion of the problem and all its repercussions. All the participants agreed that the situation was serious and had an effect upon Israel's foreign relations and reputation abroad. They all rejected the deportation option, and most of those present advised granting the "Black Hebrews" some legal status, while rigidly preventing the addition of more members to the ranks of those already in Israel.

The Director-General of the Foreign Ministry, Ephraim Evron, conveyed to the Minister of the Interior the meeting's proposal that the status of temporary resident should be granted to the "Black Hebrews" now in Israel, thus enabling them to receive housing, and health and education services. Mr. Evron emphasized that "it is impossible to continue with the present situation, which is intolerable from a human, moral, public, and political standpoint." He warned that "lack of attention to this matter causes damage to the State, and serves the propaganda apparatus of our enemies."

Activities of American Jewish Organizations

A number of American Jewish organizations were called upon in 1977 to help deal with the "Black Hebrews" problem, in view of the systematic and poisonous anti-Israel propaganda spread by the cult leaders in the United States, a campaign which also had an anti-Semitic component directed against American Jews. There have been ups and downs in Jewish-Black relationships in the United States over the years, and the Jewish leadership is anxious that there should be no further erosion of the delicate relationships between the two groups. Moreover, friends of Israel and the Jews in the Black community have warned against the negative attitude and inaction of the Israeli authorities in the handling of the "Black Hebrews" question. Bayard Rustin, a sworn friend of Israel and one of the most important Black trade union leaders, has been especially active in this matter. He heads the organization called BASIC (Black Americans in Support of Israel) and has made many efforts to reduce the tension regarding the subject of the "Black Hebrews" and to reach a mutually acceptable solution. He visited Israel several times for this purpose and met members of the Israel Government and leaders of the cult in Dimona. He has also harnessed to his aid the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith. Their representatives met in New York in February 1978 with four BASIC representatives who had been to Israel some months before and spoken with the leaders of the "Black Hebrews." A meeting convened by Ms. Miriam Logan, chairman of the "New York Committee on Human Rights," was attended by three delegates of the "Black Hebrews," as well as the representative of the *Histadrut* (General Federation of Labor), Uri Segev.

The Jewish organizations and BASIC were concerned at that time with the negative report issued in the United States by a delegation headed by Rev. Kinlock. The group, which represented a body known as the "Committee for the Elimination of Racism" attached to the New York Council of Churches, had visited Israel in December 1977 to study the living conditions of the "Black Hebrews."

At the delegation's meeting with Minister of the Interior Dr. Joseph Burg, on December 26, 1977, they said that their interest in the cult was purely humanitarian and that their committee was alert to all human problems, including that of the Soviet Jews. They complained of the difficult living conditions of the "Black Hebrews" and requested a speedy solution to the problem. The Minister explained the immigration policy of the Government, which was ready to grant status to persons arriving in Israel in good faith, but could not acquiesce in the mass immigration of groups whose ideology was demonstratively anti-Israel. The Minister added that the United States Government

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did not agree to the uncontrolled and illegal migration of Chinese to San Francisco, or of Mexicans to South California. The Minister told the delegation that the Israel Government was considering the appointment of a committee which would propose a solution to the problem.

In spite of these remarks, the delegation, as stated, published a report which was very critical of the Government of Israel, which it accused of gross violation of elementary human rights in its attitude to the "Black Hebrews." This report aroused negative repercussions in American public opinion and served as an additional stimulus to the holding of a "meeting of conciliation" (Jews and Blacks) in New York City. As a result of the conclusions reached at that meeting, it was decided to send a letter on behalf of the three above-mentioned American Jewish organizations to the Government of Israel and the *Histadrut*. In the letter sent to the Minister of the Interior on February 17, 1978, the following recommendations were conveyed:

1. Membership in the *Histadrut* should be granted to all the "Black Hebrews" resident in Israel. This would enable them to receive medical services through Kupat Holim.
2. The *Histadrut* would ask the Ministry of Labor to grant work permits to the members of the cult through the Employment Service.
3. The *Histadrut* would enable the "Black Hebrews" to benefit from all the educational and cultural services available to its membership, including financial support of the "Soul Music" Troupe.
4. A comprehensive discussion would take place with the Minister of the Interior regarding aid to the cult in the realization of its plan to set up a kibbutz which would become a national center for the growing of natural foods.

It was also agreed at the meeting, the letter said, that the cult leadership in Israel would publish a declaration explaining the aims of the cult, and the members' desire to be an organic part of the State and good citizens with equal rights and duties. In this declaration there would also be an undertaking that after the status of the cult's members had been established, its leaders would not allow any more people to join the group illegally. The organizations suggested that, as a goodwill gesture, even before the achievement of a full solution, the "Black Hebrews" who had been deported from Israel and had left their family (wives and children) behind, should be enabled to pay short visits to their families. The Black leaders who were present at the meeting were prepared to give personal guarantees for the return of the visitors to the United States.

Finally, the recommendations emphasized that in order to enable dialogue and fruitful negotiation to take place, both sides — Government spokesmen and leaders of the cult — would refrain from mutual criticism in public for six months.

The Minister of the Interior did not reply to this appeal, but at various levels the conclusions reached at the meeting had some effect. The leaders of the cult stopped their public attacks on Israel and the Jews in the media although, as has been said, the attack continued in other forms. Moreover, on March 7, 1978, in a memorandum to Bayard Rustin, Shalik Ben-Yehudah wrote: "At long last the two communities in Israel are united in a spirit of justice and amity, and the members of our community are ready to serve as goodwill ambassadors for Israel to the whole world." In this memorandum, the writer expresses the consent of the "Black Hebrews" to the arrangement reached in New York (according to him, in Dimona), by which they would join the *Histadrut* and be granted full civil rights with all that that implied; care would be taken that every new member would be accepted into the cult only after going through legal immigration processes. They also agreed to refrain from criticism of the Israeli Government for seven months.

In the light of the above arrangement, the *Histadrut* decided, on February 2, 1978, to accept the "Black

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Hebrews" as members "for humane reasons, since it was impossible to acquiesce in a situation in which they would be discriminated against in terms of wages, social benefits, and conditions of work."

Truth to tell, assuming *Histadrut* membership did not bring about any radical improvement in the living conditions of the cult. They were now entitled to receive medical treatment through the *Kupat Holim* network but, as stated above, they refrain from using organized health services and prefer to use "natural" methods of healing. No change took place as regards wages, conditions of work, and trade union protection. The *Histadrut* did make available to the cult in Dimona a place in which to hold cultural activities, but the fact that they joined the *Histadrut* had more psychological than practical significance. The *Histadrut* was proud of the new members, and in the 1978 May-Day Parade, the "Black Hebrew" group from Dimona, in colorful costume, was one of the main attractions.

Establishment of the Public Committee by the Minister of the Interior

The Government was stimulated to take action towards a solution of the "Black Hebrews" problem by the initiative of Jacques Amir, M.K. (Mayor of Dimona), who raised the subject for debate in the Knesset on March 13, 1978.

In the explanatory note to the motion, it was stated:

The above group has been in Israel for the last ten years. It has no civil status and its position is unclear. Much has been said about the nature of this group in the local and world press. Their living conditions and homes do not befit a democratic country which cares for the welfare of its citizens and residents. Before this problem assumes exaggerated proportions, the matter should be brought up on the Knesset agenda, with a view to finding a proper and humane solution. The State of Israel knew how to give sanctuary to Vietnam refugees in a spirit of love and humanity, and there is no reason why the State of Israel should not be able to grapple with the problem of the "Black Hebrews."

The Knesset plenary referred the subject to the Interior and Environment Committee which, after deliberation, recommended the setting up of a committee to examine the question. Our committee was appointed, in the light of this recommendation, by the Minister of the Interior on August 4, 1978.

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IX CONCLUSIONS

Handling by Government Authorities

1. The problem of the "Black Hebrews," as it exists today, is chiefly the result of continued mishandling by the Government of Israel during an entire decade. It would never have arisen had the first large group been denied entry into Israel in December 1969.
2. Approval for the entry of the first groups was first and foremost politically-based, because of the fear of the then Minister of the Interior and his deputy that the authorities would be accused of racism towards Blacks who regarded themselves as Jews — an accusation towards which they displayed special sensitivity because of the debate surrounding the "Who is a Jew?" question.
3. It was possible, and indeed necessary, to block the attempt of the "Black Hebrews" to immigrate to Israel when it was still in its early stages. Government agencies in Israel knew all the time that the members of the cult, in spite of their pretensions, were not Jews and thus ineligible for the rights of *aliyah* and citizenship according to the Law of Return (1950).
4. Denial of entry into Israel of the "Black Hebrews" under the Law of Entry into Israel (1952) could be explained at the time by the following rationale:
 - a) Every state, whatever the nature of its regime, scrupulously reserves for itself the right to deny strangers entry within its borders.
 - b) *In practice*, no country is prepared to absorb large numbers of human beings who are not refugees or without a homeland.
 - c) Every year the State of Israel makes it possible for non-Jews to settle permanently in Israel without any distinction regarding race, religion, or nationality; but it is inconceivable that the State of Israel should yield to the dictates of a pressure group which has decided by itself to settle there.
 - d) The State of Israel has primary responsibility towards Jews to whom the Law of Return applies. At a time when it is struggling for its very survival, the State of Israel has the right and the duty to decide priorities regarding *aliyah*, and to refrain from taking upon itself a heavy burden of absorbing large groups of citizens and residents of a foreign state.
5. Although the Government did not act in this way initially, as soon as the cult's nature and ideology, which undermined the essence of the State and of Zionism, became clear beyond a doubt, it should have repatriated the "Black Hebrews" (no more than 200 at the time) to the United States.
6. It was wrong to acquiesce in the American Government's desire to divest itself of responsibility for the members of the cult, and to regard the problem as "an internal Israeli affair." This attitude on the part of the American Government is not customary between two friendly states, and finds no support in the principles of international law.
7. Instead of taking the steps outlined above, the Government of Israel preferred to

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adopt an ostrich-like policy. The "Black Hebrews" were "tolerated" and their illegal existence ignored. Instead of dealing fundamentally with the roots of the problem, the authorities concentrated on preventing further members of the cult from entering the country. These efforts failed almost completely. Hundreds of "Black Hebrews" succeeded in infiltrating into Israel by various subterfuges, until their numbers reached the present estimated total of 1,500 souls.

8. Incidentally, the heavy-handed policy adopted in examinations of all Black tourists at the ports of entry has fouled the image of Israel among many friends, and has harmed Israel's foreign relations.
9. In spite of repeated warnings by local bodies in Dimona and Arad — the main centers of the cult — no comprehensive discussion has taken place all these years at the ministerial level on ways and means to deal with the problem.

Living Conditions, Relationships with Neighbors, and Legal, Social, and Political Implications

As a result of the Government policy of acquiescing *de facto* in the existence of the "Black Hebrews" in Israel, but at the same time refusing to grant them any recognized status, a situation has been created which has the most serious legal, social, human and political implications.

1. There are now about 1,500 men and women in Israel without any status; they are all criminal offenders because they are illegally resident in the country. Most of them received three-month tourist visas which were not renewed and which are long invalid. This is an intolerable state of affairs which has no place in any country.
2. There is no exact knowledge as to the number of members of the cult, nor a registry of their identity and places of residence. The "Black Hebrews" do not carry any official identity card or document, and this in itself is an offense against the law. In addition, this makes it well-nigh impossible for the police to trace any members of the cult suspected of criminal offenses.
3. The lack of identification and consequently of adequate police follow-up and inspection enables criminal elements from foreign countries, especially the United States, to reach Israel and "disappear" into one of the cult's centers. It is known that a number of persons "wanted" in the United States have in fact done this; among American Blacks, the State of Israel has become known as a "land of refuge" in which one can easily evade the arm of the law.
4. The authorities are not prepared to grant housing rights to the "Black Hebrews." Because of this, and as a result of their natural increase and the addition to their ranks of large groups which entered Israel illegally, terrible congestion exists in the main centers of the cult — Dimona, Arad, Mitzpeh Ramon — with thirty persons and more often living in a single apartment.
5. This phenomenon is a disgrace to the State of Israel which is justly proud of its efforts to provide decent housing standards for its residents. The living conditions of the "Black Hebrews" are far below minimum standards and only because of their

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blind devotion to the principles of the cult and their leadership do they succeed in maintaining a reasonable standard of living under totally intolerable conditions.

6. Because of the terrible congestion in their quarters, there has been a sharp decline in the quality of life in those neighborhoods where they live next door to Jewish tenants. This is undoubtedly the prime cause for the deterioration in relationships between the Jewish community and the cult. No amount of goodwill on both sides can overcome environmental nuisances caused by the over-crowded housing. Jewish residents leave the mixed neighborhood as soon as they find buyers for their apartments. Even if they are ready to take heavy losses, they can hardly find anyone ready to move in. No wonder, therefore, that there has been an escalation of tension between the two communities. One must be thankful that, so far, there has been no violent explosion.
7. The housing congestion can lead any day to an outbreak of diseases and epidemics. It is a miracle that this has not happened so far, though some Jewish residents in the mixed district complain of the spread of various illnesses.
8. The "Black Hebrews" refuse to accept orderly medical care and prefer "natural" healing methods. Though they are members of the *Kupat Holim* of the *Histadrut*, they do not in practice make use of its services.
9. There is no sanitary supervision of the members of the cult, and the public health authorities do not find them cooperative.
10. There is no registration of the births which take place in the shelters of the homes of the "Black Hebrews" with the aid of their own midwives; nor are deaths reported to the Ministries of Health and of Interior, as required by law.
11. The "Black Hebrews" maintain an independent educational network, outside the State system, and the Ministry of Education and Culture has not the slightest connection with it — a clear violation of the education laws of the State.
12. There is an ongoing violation of the law on the part of employers who give work to members of the cult and on the part of the workers themselves. Every tourist in Israel is obliged to seek a special permit from the Minister of the Interior if he wants to work. No such permits have ever been issued to the "Black Hebrews," not even to those who held valid visas. Today, when *all* the members of the cult are illegal residents in the State of Israel, it is forbidden to employ them.
13. One should not complain about the employers — among them the Mitzpeh Ramon Local Council — who employ "Black Hebrews" in violation of the law, because if they did not do so, members of the cult would have starved. However, some employers exploit the special situation by not paying the cult members standard wages and providing social benefits.
14. Government policy is obscure regarding this problem of employment. There are no guidelines instructing the Employment Service how to act in this matter. In at least one instance this vacuum has been exploited, namely by the Employment Service director in Arad (personally one of the most stringent opponents of the

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cult), who applies the law harshly and terminates the employment of the cult's members in Arad at every opportunity.

15. The personal status of the "Black Hebrews" is not legally defined. In the legal sense, there is absolute license with regard to marriage and divorce, which are not regularized, according to accepted norms, within the life of the cult. Polygamy is frequent within the cult but is not punishable because, legally, no man is married even to a single wife.

There is no legal registration of marriage and divorce, and in the light of what has been said above such registration has no significance.

Political and Social Considerations

1. The "Black Hebrews" are a cult with all the characteristics of the cults that have been multiplying in the last decade, especially in the United States. They are led by a charismatic leader, Ben-Ami Carter, who exercises unrestrained control over the members of his community. Carter alone decides the way of life for the group and for individuals alike. He sets the standards of behavior and the punishments for breaches thereof.
2. No proof has been adduced of the existence of a system of corporal punishment, but there is undoubtedly a system of social sanctions (such as "excommunication" and "exile") which are equally serious for those punished because of the pressures and compulsions which arise from living in the very special framework of the cult.
3. The cult retains its closed character, and its members do not have any contacts with the outside world, except for those necessary for their livelihood. Contacts with the authorities and public bodies are exclusively in the hands of Ben-Ami Carter, even if other members of the leadership group add their signatures *pro forma* to applications on behalf of the cult.
4. It is difficult to decide whether the leaders' motivations are in fact pure. Some say that they are motivated by a sense of mission; others regard them as charlatans who seek power and wealth. It cannot be denied that the "Black Hebrews" follow their leader blindly, with faith in his sincerity and in the truth of the cult's ideology. There is no doubt, either, that this blind faith is a result of lengthy indoctrination and brain-washing.
5. The "Black Hebrews" have not infrequently been accused of widespread criminal activity in Israel, but this committee found no confirmation of these accusations. It seems that the crime rate among the members of the cult is lower than the average in the country, largely because of the leaders' desire to keep a low profile and not give the authorities an excuse to deport them from the country.
6. At the same time, there is some evidence of criminal activity on the part of cult members in the United States. The authorities there have conducted extensive investigations with regard to suspected crimes, such as theft, embezzlement, and

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fraud to the tune of millions of dollars — allegedly committed by “Black Hebrews” who have escaped to Israel. Apparently, these activities were designed to provide finances for the cult in Israel.

7. The Committee does not share the view that the very existence of the cult in Israel represents an *acute and significant* security risk. At the same time, it is clear that the existence of this cult with its special ideology and motivation obliges the security authorities to maintain a constant alertness to what transpires within its ranks.
8. The “Black Hebrews” ideology is based on the belief that they are the *true* Jews, descended directly from the Ten Tribes, and that the Jewish people is “phoney.”
9. It is reasonable to assume that, in the beginning, the cult leaders saw in the return to Liberia — the independent Black African state — the solution to the national and religious problem of the Blacks. The “Black Hebrews” were to spearhead extensive settlement of American Blacks in that country. To this end, members of the cult migrated to Liberia. However, after they had gone through severe trials and tribulations in that country, the cult’s leaders did an ideological about-face and shifted the focus of their ideology to the Land of Israel.

Now they argue that the Land of Israel is their historic birthright, which the Zionists have illegally usurped. Their aim, announced not so long ago, is to bring to Israel all the Blacks in the world who will identify with the principles of the cult.

10. The “Black Hebrews” are not Jews by any criterion, however liberal. This has been settled conclusively by the halachic authorities in Israel, and in this view the High Court of Justice concurred (Clark v. Minister of the Interior).

The cult’s “religious” customs are an amalgam of ceremonies in which strong Christian influences are discernible with the addition of certain Jewish and Moslem elements.

11. Until mid-1978, the “Black Hebrews” conducted an anti-Israel propaganda campaign in Israel and the United States, and directed appeals to the media, and to numerous public bodies, among them groups hostile to Israel. At times, the attack on the Israeli authorities was poisonous and sharp, and even contained open anti-Semitism directed against American Jews.
12. In 1976, following upon the “agreement” between the “Black Hebrews” and the major American-Jewish organizations, public attacks on Israel came to an end, but the leaders of the cult continued to make undercover approaches to various international bodies, and to denigrate Israel.

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X ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM

This committee has given much thought to possible solutions. All the options proposed are difficult, and far from providing a complete solution to this complex problem. All the proposals have merits and demerits, and are fairly evenly balanced.

The options are:

1. to leave the situation as it is,
2. to deport the cult from Israel,
3. to allow the cult to remain in Israel.

While options 1. and 2. are complete and all-inclusive, option 3. can be carried out in various ways which we shall describe later.

1. Leave the Situation as it is

To preserve the status-quo, to follow a policy of non-intervention, in the hope that "time will solve the problem somehow" is the least acceptable option for the following reasons:

- a) Relationships between the "Black Hebrews" and their neighbors have reached a point of crisis. The continuation of the present situation is an invitation to violent incidents, the consequences of which cannot be predicted.
- b) To acquiesce in the sub-standard living conditions of the members of the cult would be a disgrace to the State of Israel and to every enlightened citizen. Moreover, this would add fuel to the propaganda campaigns conducted by Israel's enemies.
- c) It is inconceivable that thousands of people should reside in the State of Israel without any legal status, beyond the law, and violating legal norms in various areas every single day.
- d) If the "Black Hebrews" are to continue to be regarded simply as "tolerated" persons, the authorities will in effect be deprived of any opportunity to supervise and control the size of the cult, and to guarantee that accepted norms will be binding upon them.
- e) There will be an increased danger of turning the cult into a focus of criminal activity and threats to security in the towns in which it is concentrated and even beyond them.

2. Deport the Cult from Israel

This is perhaps the most "popular" option as far as Israeli public opinion is concerned. It was recommended by the Israel Police, for the reasons stated below:

- a) There is no precedent for the situation in which a group numbering hundreds of

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persons migrates to a country and resides there illegally, while adopting an attitude which denies the existence of that same country. Every state uses its right to limit immigration and to expel from its borders persons who reside there illegally.

- b) Expulsion of the cult will be a partial or complete solution of the legal, social, and political aspects of the problem.
- c) With the elimination of the "Black Hebrews" stronghold in Israel, the motivation behind their anti-Israel propaganda would disappear in the course of time.
- d) It would be possible to carry out the expulsion in stages, reducing the difficulty of the procedure by expelling the leaders as a first step towards weakening the group.
- e) Fear of unfavorable public reaction to the deportation could be reduced considerably by emphasizing the following points:
 - 1) The State of Israel is exercising its sovereign right to deport persons residing illegally within its borders.
 - 2) There is no connection between the skin-color of the "Black Hebrews" and the intention to deport them. They would have been liable to deportation even if they were not Black.
 - 3) The "Black Hebrews" deny the existence of the State of Israel, and they intend to organize mass migration of American and African Blacks to Israel, thereby endangering the security of the State.
 - 4) The "Black Hebrews" abused the hospitality extended to them on their arrival in Israel by maintaining their own judicial system in violation of the law, engaging in poisonous anti-Israel propaganda, and using subterfuges in order to smuggle numbers of people into Israel.
 - 5) The "Black Hebrews" also have an anti-American ideology which forecasts destruction for all Western countries.
 - 6) The State of Israel has absorbed Jewish refugees from all over the world. There is also a problem of Palestinian refugees, and a political and military conflict of long-standing with the Arab states. In view of Israel's special position, it cannot take upon itself the extra burden of problems affecting thousands of Black immigrants.

The above points are the advantages to which supporters of the deportation option refer. In contrast, those who reject this option argue as follows:

- a) It might have been possible to justify expulsion, for all the reasons outlined above, during the first period of the "Black Hebrews" residence in Israel. But now, more than ten years after the arrival of the first group, we have missed the boat, and regrettably must pay the price for the Government's mishandling of the matter throughout the years.

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- b) To expel the cult from Israel would create hostile public opinion against Israel throughout the world, of an intensity which cannot be accurately foreseen.
- c) Anti-Israel propaganda would increase still further because of the black skins of the members of the cult. The reason behind the expulsion would be explained as racism, and this argument would fall on ready ears in the African states and among American Blacks.
- d) Leaders of the large American Jewish organizations warned that expulsion would have severe repercussions on Black-Jewish relations in the United States. They fear that, if the cult were expelled from Israel, the delicate balance of relationships between the two groups in the U.S. would be impaired and Israel's interests would be damaged among her friends in the American Black community.
- e) There are immense practical difficulties involved in the expulsion of hundreds of men, women, and children to another country, in addition to the politico-legal problem of expelling persons who have voluntarily waived their American citizenship.
- f) There is no reason to believe that the "Black Hebrews" would willingly accept their expulsion from Israel. Their high motivation, iron discipline and blind obedience to the instructions of their leader are likely to lead to a tragedy which would scar the conscience of those responsible for the expulsion. Such a possibility cannot be ignored.
- g) In any event, there will be many Jews both in Israel and abroad, among them victims of persecutions and expulsions, who will be horrified at the thought of mass expulsion of men, women, and children — however negative the general attitude towards the cult might be.

3. Allow the Cult to Remain in Israel

The third option is to allow the "Black Hebrews" to stay in Israel, and to solve wholly or in part the difficult problems created by their residence here.

The arguments against this option can be summarized as follows:

- a) It would perpetuate a situation in which a group that rejects the existence of the Jewish State in Israel would permanently reside in Israel.
- b) The "Black Hebrews" represent a security risk, which is of special significance in the present situation.
- c) The cult might become the focus of criminal activity and require increased police surveillance.

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- d) The very existence of a cult with strange patterns of behavior does not suit the character of Israeli society.
- e) A solution of this kind would place a financial burden on the State which could not be morally justified when Israel's economic difficulties are constantly increasing.

The arguments in favor of this option are as follows:

- a) The intolerable phenomenon of the cult's illegal presence in Israel would come to an end.
- b) It would also correct the situation in which a large community in Israel has been living *de facto* beyond the law and in ongoing violation of state legislation.
- c) Once the "Black Hebrews" have been granted a legal status that would regularize their identification, the law enforcement authorities, and especially the police, would be able to keep them under surveillance.
- d) The difficult situations created by the serious deficiencies in their housing, sanitation, and employment would be ameliorated if not completely eliminated. This would make life easier for them, for their neighbors, and for the local authorities within whose jurisdiction they live.
- e) The wind would be taken out of the sails of the anti-Israel propaganda campaign on this subject.
- f) Israel's image throughout the world, and especially in the United States, would improve. This might lead to a strengthening of ties with friendly groups within the American Black community.

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XI RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS THAT THE "BLACK HEBREWS" BE ALLOWED TO STAY IN ISRAEL.

The committee reached this conclusion after rejecting the only other possible option — deportation of the cult members from Israel. The pros and cons of deportation have already been listed. The committee decided that the arguments adduced against that course were compelling.

The committee's decision was not taken lightly. It was "the lesser evil" — the option less serious in application and repercussions — but still not the ideal solution. As has been emphasized, it was possible to halt the entry of "Black Hebrews" early in the game (and should have been done for the reasons outlined in this report) and to deport the first groups. This opportunity, however, was allowed to slip away. Deportation at this stage is likely to cause untold harm to Israel and to its reputation throughout the world and among American Jewry, quite apart from the practical difficulties and the moral aspects of such a mass expulsion of men, women, and children.

At the same time, the conclusion that the "Black Hebrews" should be allowed to stay in Israel makes it imperative to take a whole series of steps to eliminate or reduce the serious problems which have arisen in connection with this cult.

2. THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS THAT THE MEMBERS OF THE CULT BE GRANTED LEGAL STATUS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW OF ENTRY INTO ISRAEL, 1952.

Granting the "Black Hebrews" legal status will do away with the intolerable situation in which all the members now residing in Israel are in fact offenders against the law. It will place them under the authority of the laws of the State with regard to population registration, employment, education, health, etc. and will enable them to be identified and supervised by the law-enforcement authorities. It will also express recognition of the fact of their permanent residence and absorption in the country.

This status must be granted in accordance with the regulations established in the Law of Entry Into Israel, 1952, and Regulations on Entry Into Israel, 1974, enacted under that law. The rules should be generously applied, in view of the special character of the problem.

The following recommendations are accordingly made:

1. The "Black Hebrews" are not Jews within the terms of the law and therefore the special rules regarding citizenship and population registration in the case of Jews shall not apply to them. For persons who can not enjoy automatic Israeli citizenship by virtue of the Law of the Return, the Law of Entry Into Israel and its regulations prescribe a procedure with many stages, starting with the granting of a tourist visa and ending with the granting of full citizenship.
2. The committee recommends that those members of the cult who have been in Israel for less than 27 months and who do not hold a tourist visa (or whose visa

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has expired), shall receive a B/2 visa which will be extended by the Ministry of the Interior to the end of 27 months from the date of their entry into Israel. At the same time, they will be given a work permit (B/1) which will also be valid to the end of the 27 months, provided the requirements of the law, calling for the signing of a work agreement with the employer and receipt of a recommendation from the Employment Service or other government agency, have been fulfilled. Such recommendation should be given without undue delay.

After 27 months, they shall be granted the status of "long-term temporary resident," a status not enumerated in the Regulations on Entry Into Israel, which provide for temporary residence (A/1) visas for potential *olim*, A/2 visas for students, and A/3 visas for clergymen. In spite of this, the Ministry of the Interior, in special cases, does recognize an additional status of "long-term temporary resident" under the Law of Entry Into Israel. Such a visa can be extended without limit, and gives its holder the right to an identity card and to work without having to obtain special permission.

3. This "long-term temporary resident" status will also be granted to "Black Hebrews" resident in Israel for longer than 27 months. They will be given a two-year residence permit (as will the first group, mentioned in paragraph 2). After two years, members of the cult will be granted permanent residence permits, following discussion and decision by the inter-ministerial committee which deals with applications for permanent residence permits.
4. The recommendations made in paragraphs 2 and 3 do not apply automatically to all the members of the cult collectively. In every case, the status will be granted individually, according to the accepted criteria under Section 9 of the Regulations on Entry Into Israel. Section 9 gives the Minister of the Interior discretion to refuse to grant the applicant a visa and permanent residence permit, or to cancel such visa or permit if the applicant
 - a) acts or has acted against the Jewish people
 - b) is likely to endanger the safety of the State
 - c) has a criminal past, likely to endanger public peace
 - d) is likely to offend public feelings
 - e) is likely to become a burden on public institutions
 - f) violates or has violated any law in force in Israel
 - g) has made a false declaration in order to obtain a visa and permanent residence permit, or has not carried out the conditions laid down in the law or regulations, or the conditions which he undertook at the time of his application, or which were specified as conditions for the approval of his application
 - h) is a person of whom there is *prima facie* evidence that his arrival in Israel is connected with evading the payment of debts, or
 - i) is liable to endanger the public peace or public health.

After stating that each case should be scrutinized individually, we wish to stress that the above-mentioned criteria should not be applied harshly, since if that were done, not a single member of the cult would qualify for a residence permit. Certainly the "Black Hebrews" do not meet the test of Section 9, subsection g) of the Regulations, and subsections d), e) and f) could easily be invoked against them. This is not the intention of this committee.

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Besides normal interest in the objective examination of each case on its merits, consideration must be given to the special problem created by the existence of the cult in Israel, if one is to enable the majority of them to enjoy a legal status. At the same time, the protection of the committee's recommendations must under no circumstances be used to grant status to clearly criminal elements fleeing the arm of the law in their country of origin, and seeking refuge among the Black community in Israel.

Procedures for Granting Legal Status

1. The committee recommends that each member of the cult aged 16 and over should appear *personally* before the competent committee of the Ministry of the Interior handling the issuance of residence permits. The committee will decide on each case in accordance with the rules outlined above. The decision regarding parents shall apply to their children as well.
2. The applicant shall present to the committee a passport or some other identifying document from the American Embassy, in order to make it possible to examine his/her particulars, including the date of entry into Israel.
3. The Ministry of Interior committee shall grant the applicant a residence permit in accordance with the rules, if it is convinced that (s)he is resident in Israel as part of the "Black Hebrews" cult of his/her own free will, without any coercion, and is desirous of so continuing.
4. In every case in which the applicant expresses a desire to leave Israel, this shall be granted after (s)he has made a declaration in writing to that effect. The expenses of the journey to the United States will be paid in accordance with the agreement reached in July 1976 with the American Embassy in Israel. At the same time, influence should be brought to bear on the Embassy to finance as well the return journey to the United States of persons who previously waived their American citizenship.

Members of the cult against whom orders for extradition to the U.S. have been issued, shall be deported from Israel.

5. The Ministry of the Interior committee is also requested to examine special applications from "Black Hebrews" abroad, who have relatives in the cult in Israel and wish to join them. Clause 6(1) of the Regulations on Entry Into Israel, with appropriate amendments, should be applied to them. The reference is to a small number of relatives as defined in the Regulations — spouse, minor or dependent adult child, and parent. This committee recommends the granting of such applications for reunion of families in special cases.
6. Every applicant shall have the right of appeal against a decision of the Ministry of Interior committee, to an inter-ministerial committee which shall be charged with the implementation of these recommendations (see below).

When the Minister of the Interior reaches a final decision regarding an application

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from a member of the cult, he shall be guided by the recommendation of the inter-ministerial committee.

7. Once recognized status is accorded by the state authorities, in accordance with the aforesaid rules, each member of the cult is to be identified and become subject to all the State laws with regard to population registration, education, employment, health, national insurance, etc.
8. When the members of the Ministry of the Interior committee have to decide whether or not to grant the right of permanent residence in Israel to all or some of the "Black Hebrews," two years after the "long-term temporary residency" permits have been issued, their main consideration shall be to ascertain whether the law has been observed *de facto* during the transition period. Further, they must examine the all-important question of the degree to which the cult has been integrated into the State without attempting to endanger the fabric of Israel society and its security.

3. THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS MOVING THE "BLACK HEBREWS" TO A SPECIAL VILLAGE COMMUNITY.

1. Together with the issuance of legal status to the members of the cult, the committee recommends a solution to the housing problem. Although the first matter is not necessarily bound up with the second, initial efforts to carry out a plan for their resettlement should be made immediately upon the granting of legal status as recommended above. In the nature of things, this process will take a long time, but the period involved should be kept to the necessary minimum.
2. All the bodies contacted by the committee agreed that the "Black Hebrews" could not be left in their present situation, inhabiting a number of buildings in the heart of mixed neighborhoods in Dimona, Arad and Mitzpeh Ramon. We have already dealt in detail with the crowded conditions in which they are living, and the extensive suffering this causes them and their neighbors.

There are four options available:

- a) adding new housing units in the present neighborhoods, for the members of the cult
- b) setting up an agricultural community for the cult
- c) setting up a village community
- d) setting up a special suburb within the jurisdiction of one of the local authorities in the area of their present residence.

The first option was dismissed outright as being unrealistic. There is no physical possibility to add housing units within the present areas in which the "Black Hebrews" are living. Furthermore, the cult leaders have frequently expressed their wish to gather all their members in Israel together in a single framework. The committee is of the view that this request should be met.

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4. The committee does not find it necessary to specify the location of this proposed village community. This is the task of the government agencies which deal with these matters. Nonetheless, in our view, the area of Ramat Hovev south of Beersheba (within the jurisdiction of the Ramat Ha-Negev Regional Council) seems to be suitable. The community will have to be located close to the phosphate, bromine, and other plants planned to rise in the new industrial area. It will then be able to meet the increasing demand for labor in this area.
5. It will take two to three years to plan and set up a community of this size. In order to save time, the settlers might be housed, in the first stage, in temporary structures (even caravans): they are certainly ready for this. Considering the time and price factors, permanent housing must be of a standard permitting good, speedy, and comparatively cheap construction.
6. At a conservative estimate, setting up this community is likely to cost between 300-400 million Israeli pounds. This financial burden should be divided between the government agencies and the "Black Hebrews." The members of the cult in Israel, and especially in the United States, as well as their many supporters in the American Black community, are prepared to bear part of the financial burden involved. It is vital that this readiness, expressed by the cult leaders and their friends in the United States to the chairman of this committee, find practical expression. Perhaps it will also be possible to involve the large American Jewish organizations in this special task, in view of the great interest they have shown in seeking a fitting solution to the problem of the "Black Hebrews." It would not be fair for the entire burden of such a project to be laid on the shoulders of the Israeli tax payers.

This committee believes that the new community should be set up in stages, with active participation by the members of the cult and the mobilization of financial support from their sympathizers abroad.

7. Once the first stage in the construction is completed, it must be ensured that all the "Black Hebrews" who are today scattered in Dimona, Arad, Mitzpeh Ramon and other places move to the new location within a reasonable time. Their leaders, especially Ben-Ami Carter, will have to take responsibility for this.

4. THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS THAT THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CULT UNDERTAKE AN UNCONDITIONAL GUARANTEE NOT TO ADD NEW IMMIGRANTS FROM ABROAD TO THE COMMUNITY.

When the leader of the cult, Ben-Ami Carter, met this committee, he was ready to provide a guarantee not to add immigrants from abroad to the community. He repeated this assurance several times in meetings with the chairman of the committee, when it was made clear to him that such a guarantee was a pre-condition for any solution to the "Black Hebrews" problem.

Carter emphasized this in a letter sent to the Minister of the Interior, Dr. Joseph Burg, on January 14, 1979, which is reproduced herewith:

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Subject: *The Community of Black Hebrew Israelites*

In the first place, peace be with you! I write this letter on behalf of all our community residing in Dimona, Mitzpeh Ramon, and Arad. I want to set down in writing our feelings and attitudes towards the State of Israel and its inhabitants. First of all, we regard ourselves as Israelis bound up with the fate of the State of Israel both spiritually and physically. Accordingly, we do not wish to do anything which would create problems or distress to the State. That is to say, we are not now, and shall not be in the future, negative factors for the State of Israel. I confess, without going into details, that when we first came to Israel, we had an outsider's concept [of Israel?] . . . we will be a productive community for the good of the State.* Accordingly, we ask for your understanding and help and for you to give us this opportunity to work shoulder to shoulder. You can be assured that we only want to stay in the Land of Israel and to serve the God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

We are ready to agree to conditions which will be fair all round. *In addition, if we are so requested, we shall not add illegally a single person to our community, and we will continue to try to convince the State of Israel to accept other ["Black Hebrews"] only through official channels.* I wish to express our yearning to bring this chapter to a conclusion and to turn over to a new and positive page in our relationships. In addition, our community works for the State of Israel abroad and can bring about fascinating results in America and Africa. I am sure that we shall stand together and every one will benefit from this addition of strength. We stand "on high alert" to help and to serve.

Respectfully yours,

(signed) BEN-AMI CARTER
on behalf of the Israelite community

In accordance with the above letter and various conversations, the "Black Hebrews" are ready to agree to the condition of non-attachment of additional immigrants to their cult without government approval; but they request that this matter should be reviewed again in a few years' time. It must be made clear to the leaders of the cult that their permanent status in Israel is conditional on the scrupulous observance of these instructions, and that any member of the cult found without an official document, after the implementation of the recommendations regarding the granting of recognized status to every individual in the cult, will be deported immediately.

It is recommended that the law enforcement authorities institute ongoing surveillance of the activities of the "Black Hebrews." This task will be made easier when the recommendations for identifying and tracing the cult members are carried out. For this purpose, a police post should be set up at the new settlement site.

* This is a translation of the Hebrew text of the committee's report. The Hebrew text is incomplete at this point.

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5. THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INTER-MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE.

In order to carry out the committee's recommendations, we propose that the Government of Israel appoint an inter-ministerial committee, headed by the Director-General of the Ministry of the Interior and constituted of representatives of the Ministries concerned, to supervise the implementation of the recommendations and to consider questions which have not been answered in the report of this committee. We do not pretend that there are no questions remaining open. The inter-ministerial committee will also serve as a board of appeals against decisions of the Ministry of the Interior committee on questions of status, as stated above.

It is desirable that the Minister of the Interior bring the committee's recommendations before the Government for its approval as soon as possible, and that an immediate start be made to implement these recommendations in accordance with the priorities we have indicated. The Government is also requested to name a minister who will be responsible at cabinet level for the implementation of the recommendations as approved by the Government.

FINAL REMARKS

We feel that we owe the Minister of the Interior who appointed the committee, and the public, an explanation of the delay which occurred in the presentation of this report.

The Minister of the Interior appointed the committee to examine the problem of the cult which calls itself the "Black Hebrews" in accordance with the August 4, 1978 recommendation of the Interior and Environment Committee of the Knesset. The Minister asked the committee to complete its work and hand in its recommendations within two months. Since then twenty months have passed.

It immediately became apparent that the time allocated to the committee was too limited, in view of the nature of the problem, its complexity, the need to meet with the large number of bodies involved, and the importance of observing the situation first-hand. However, these were not the only reasons for the delay in publishing the conclusions and recommendations. In fact, the committee completed most of its work in seven months, and asked its chairman to draw up the report.

This was a long drawn-out process for two reasons: First, new information about the "Black Hebrews" came in from time to time, including classified material about the cult; this could affect the conclusions and recommendations. Second, and this is the major reason for the delay, the final conclusions reached by the committee were the fruit of much difficult heart-searching. More than once in the course of the deliberations, the scale tilted in favor of one option or another. In one passage in our report, we criticized the delays in the Government's handling of the "Black Hebrews" problem. It may be said, however, in justification of the Government agencies, that this question — with all its political, social, legal, and moral implications — must certainly be one of the most difficult ever faced by the people of Israel, far exceeding the number of people involved. Accordingly, we too took time to weigh the matter carefully until we reached our conclusions.

Finally, over and above all other considerations, it seems to us that the recommendation to allow the "Black Hebrews" to stay in Israel, to grant them recognized status, and to allocate a site for their settlement, is basically a moral, humane and *Jewish* decision. Its speedy implementation, in spite of the many difficulties that may be encountered, will be a tribute to the maturity of Jewish society in Israel.

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